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EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21 AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL: WAYS IN WHICH, UPON REQUEST, THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM AND BILATERAL DONORS ARE ASSISTING COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, IN THE PREPARATION OF PERIODIC COMMUNICATIONS OR NATIONAL REPORTS AND NATIONAL AGENDA 21 ACTION PLANS

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In addressing the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the General Assembly, in resolution A/47/191, paragraph 16 (d), requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission on Sustainable Development, at its first substantive session, a report entitled "Ways in which, upon request, the United Nations system and bilateral donors are assisting countries, particularly developing countries, in the preparation of national reports and national Agenda 21 action plans."

2. In order to prepare this report, the Secretary-General, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), approached all UNDP resident representatives for specific information on this matter. As of 31 May 1993, responses covering 110 developing countries or countries with economies in transition had been received through UNDP field offices.

3. An analysis of the responses received shows that in about 80 per cent of the responding countries Governments have taken specific steps to follow up on UNCED decisions. These steps can be broken down into the following broad categories.

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* E/CN.17/1993/4.

4. In about 70 countries, national coordinating committees or similar bodies or groups have been established to address UNCED decisions and recommendations. In an additional nine countries, such coordinating bodies or groups are being considered. For comparison, it can be noted that about three quarters of the countries submitting national reports to UNCED made use of similar inter-ministerial/interdepartmental preparatory groups, often designated as national UNCED committees. In slightly more than half of these countries, national UNCED committees included the representatives of non-governmental organizations. The composition of the national UNCED follow-up groups is not yet known.

5. Fourteen developing countries have indicated that draft or even final texts for national Agenda 21 action plans already exist. In an additional 66 countries, national Agenda 21 action plans are under discussion.

6. In at least 76 responding countries, new projects to follow up UNCED have been identified and in most cases funding for such projects has already been requested. However, it is not entirely clear from the responses how many of these projects are really new and how many are a continuation of earlier activities, perhaps linked with preparations for the Conference itself. But it is quite clear that most countries are actively following up on decisions adopted at UNCED, although relatively little time has passed since the Conference and many activities are therefore still in the early stages of follow-up.

7. Approximately 12 bilateral and multilateral donors, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, are reported as having already taken some follow-up action, after being approached with specific or preliminary requests by developing countries.

8. In addition, some 20 donors, including the World Bank, the European Community, the Asian Development Bank and the Organization of American States, are reported to have shown interest in supporting Governments in the follow-up process.

9. According to UNDP sources, more than 40 countries have formally or informally requested UNDP assistance in preparing national Agenda 21 action plans. According to the same sources, more than 30 countries have not made any contacts with donors at this stage. Many developing countries are actively working on national Agenda 21 action plans on their own, without external support at this stage, and UNDP reports that, once such agendas have been prepared, requests for assistance can be expected.

10. Other requests for assistance have been specifically addressed for Global Environment Facility funding, funding under the UNDP Capacity 21 programme, or funding under the United Nations Environment Programme. Furthermore, certain requests have reportedly been addressed to the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office, the United Nations Chidren's Fund, the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

11. As for non-governmental organizations, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Worldwide Fund for Nature and the International

Institute on Environment and Development have been mentioned as co-sponsors of follow-up activities.

12. In addition to UNDP resident representatives, all major donor countries have been surveyed on how they are responding to specific requests from developing countries and what kind of actions they have taken or are contemplating.

13. Detailed information on plans and activities of bilateral donors to assist recipient countries in implementation of Agenda 21, based on the responses received, is contained in E/CN.17/1993/11/Add.1. Brief summaries of responses relevant to the subject of the present report are provided below in alphabetical order.

14. Australia reports that it is receptive to requests for assistance in the development of national reports and environmental action plans. It has provided financial and technical support to the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme in developing a key role in UNCED follow-up in the region. Australia has also sought to strengthen the ability of Pacific Island countries through seven different projects at an estimated cost of US$ 14 million, intends to assist countries that are members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations in developing environmental policy and is investigating the usefulness of environmental profiles for identifying environmental priorities. The first such profiles will be prepared for Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

15. Canada, jointly with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), will carry out a workshop in October 1993 on national plans for sustainable development. Canada has also created the Institute for Sustainable Development and has supported the UNDP Sustainable Development Network as well as contributing to the UNDP Capacity 21 initiative. Support for sustainable development and environmental planning projects are under way. Major initiatives include projects in Indonesia, Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

16. Denmark endeavours to focus on capacity-building and national environmental strategies. It has supported environmental institutional development and the preparation of sustainable development plans at the state level in India. Bhutan has received assistance in preparing national environmental strategies and Uganda has received similar assistance for its National Water Action Plan.

17. Finland was one of the main contributors to the funding of UNCED national reports and will assist developing countries in preparing country studies related to conventions on climate change and biodiversity, as well as in preparing for a convention on combating desertification. Finland has also actively supported countries with economies in transition.

18. France, in conformity with UNCED decisions, will emphasize projects initiated by non-governmental organizations and local organizations in the key sectors of Agenda 21. In French-speaking developing countries emphasis will be placed, inter alia, on the preparation of national reports. In 1993, France will support national environment action plans in Madagascar, Seychelles, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi and Rwanda at a cost of FF 100 million.

19. Areas in which Germany cooperates include environmental planning and monitoring, institutional strengthening and information system development. Germany is contributing to the preparation of national plans for sustainable development by providing experts and technical assistance on a short-term basis. Longer term cooperation programmes for formulating and implementing such national plans, especially in Africa, are being planned. Germany is actively participating in international programmes and planning efforts related to capacity-building and national plans through the UNDP Capacity 21 initiative and the OECD/Development Assistance Committee Working Party on Environment and Development.

20. Iceland has recently increased its total development assistance, while the issue of assisting countries in the preparation of national reports and national Agenda 21 action plans is under consideration.

21. Ireland reports that it will sympathetically consider requests for assistance in the preparation of national reports and national Agenda 21 action plans in the context of increasing capacity-building in sub-Saharan African countries.

22. Japan reports that it attaches great importance in its environmental aid to enhancing the ability of developing countries to deal with environmental problems and facilitating the transfer of environmentally sound technology, by means of its grant aid and technical cooperation schemes.

23. The Netherlands is providing financial assistance in the preparation of a great variety of national and subnational plans and programmes in various fields of sustainable development. Among them are subnational environmental profiles, national conservation strategies, national environmental action plans, and national reports in the context of UNCED and its follow-up.

24. Norway contributes both bilaterally and multilaterally through a specially established environmental fund. Significant assistance is allocated from this fund to assist developing countries in formulating national environmental strategies and environmental managerial plans. Norway has so far not received requests for assistance to develop national reports and national Agenda 21 action plans.

25. Sweden considers capacity-building to be one of the most important ways of achieving sustainable development in developing countries and supports UNDP activities in this area. In the context of its support of the negotiations for a convention to combat desertification, Sweden provides funds for country studies and for an expert meeting that Sweden will convene.

26. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has funded a report by the International Institute for Environment and Development to guide countries in the preparation of national Agenda 21 action plans. The United Kingdom is committed to producing its own national sustainable development report by the end of 1993.